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## Branching out *Brazil*

Planting fresh ideas for her discipline in native soil, Brazilian landscape architect Isabel Duprat's flora-focused design vision is influential – and it's growing.

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“Garden design in Brazil is still not as respected as it should be,” says Isabel Duprat. It is a balmy day in São Paulo when MONOCLE meets the country's pre-eminent landscape architect, who lays bare her feelings about the state of the discipline in her home nation. She is well placed to comment on the topic. Having earned her stripes under legendary Brazilian landscape architect Roberto Burle Marx, Duprat collaborates with some of architecture's biggest names today, from Marcio Kogan to Moshe Safdie. And she has a 45-year pedigree that makes her well equipped to fly the flag for the discipline in her home country.

Born in São Paulo in 1954, Duprat says that she was destined to design gardens and landscapes from a young age. “I always had this intimacy with planting and I would get all muddied up from playing on the land as a child,” says Duprat, referencing time spent at her family's small farm in the countryside near São Paulo. Encouraged by her mother's enthusiasm for gardening, Duprat dreamed of studying botany before ultimately pivoting to architecture. “In high-school, I said, ‘I think I will go and study architecture, so I can do landscape design.’ Brazil didn't have a school for landscape architecture at the time.”

Despite never wanting to create buildings, Duprat graduated with an architecture degree in 1978, from the Mackenzie School in São Paulo. This institution is renowned for producing a host of multi-disciplinary talents, from modern painter Anita Malfatti to architect Paulo Mendes da Rocha, and Duprat made up for the lack of landscape classes by reading extensively on the subject. “At the beginning of my career, because of Brazil's military dictatorship, it was really hard to get hold of any international books about my field of interest,” says Duprat. She



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*Previous spread*  
1. Casa 3M in São Paulo

*This spread*  
1. Outside looking in  
2. Greenery envelops the house from all angles  
3. Albert Einstein Education and Research Centre



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also attended botany classes at the University of São Paulo. It was a self-imposed education that was soon enhanced by an internship with Burle Marx.

Often referred to as the Oscar Niemeyer of Brazilian landscape architecture, Burle Marx began changing the public's perception of Brazilian garden design since the 1930s. His work on high-profile public projects in Brasília, particularly gardens at the Ministry of Army and Itamaraty Palace, shifted expectations away from the Renaissance and Baroque forms associated with the gardens of the former Portuguese colony. Burle Marx's works were abstract and organic, inspired by modern art and the native landscapes. He also replaced European species with the lush tropical plants that are indigenous to the country.

Burle Marx's effect on landscape architecture in Brazil – and on Duprat – was profound. "I was very influenced by him," she says. "He had a richness inside him. He was, for instance, [not only an excellent designer] but also an excellent opera singer. And we once travelled to the coastal region of Angra dos Reis to research new plants in person. It was a very important time for me, where I absorbed a lot of things that I still use in my work today."

That work stepped up a notch in 1983, when Duprat opened her garden design studio and a plant shop (she moved to her current office in 2003). Early clients were based in Rio de Janeiro and included the Marinho

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family – owners of Globo, the country's largest broadcaster – and the Moreira Salles banking dynasty. Both commissioned Duprat to work on their private residences. Despite being a proud Paulista, her experience working elsewhere and her field trips with Burle Marx expanded her conception of what good design could be. "It freed my work," she says. "Just looking at the Rio landscape with its mountains, I let myself go in a very positive way. Life there is lived outside, unlike in São Paulo." Intending to share what she had learned from her work by leaving the city, Duprat hosted a garden history and landscape design tutorial at the gardening school in São Paulo's Ibirapuera Park (which, appropriately enough, was designed by Burle Marx and Niemeyer).

Today, Duprat has clients across Brazil, from Rio de Janeiro to coastal towns in the state of Bahia. Working with architect Nathalia Fonseca and her husband, Manoel Leão – a musician and agricultural engineer who helps to co-ordinate the studio's garden designs delivery – the landscape architect has instant name recognition in her

hometown. Her namesake practice, which employs eight people, is in the leafy neighbourhood of Jardins. The office where MONOCLE meets to discuss her recent projects is striking, lined with sucupira wood panelling.

Like Burle Marx, Duprat's portfolio includes everything from private gardens to public works. There are plans afoot for a park in the mountainous city of Campos do Jordão and a new roof garden for São Paulo's Iguatemi shopping centre. The most significant recent civic commission was the Albert Einstein Education and Research Centre, a medical school in São Paulo designed by Safdie Architects: Duprat was tasked with bringing flora to the skylit atrium. Planting 149 native trees and palms, she designed the space in such a way that the greenery would survive in an environment with 50 per cent less light than outdoors. "It was a very complex project," says Duprat. "The plants spent two years acclimatising in a vivarium [a controlled terrarium-like environment]." As with many of her projects, this was pioneering work in Brazil and it was meticulously researched through consultations with UK-based Kew Gardens botanist Sue Minter and State University of Campinas professor Rafael Ribeiro.

When it comes to working with residential architects and their clients, Duprat is particularly demanding. "When you want to have a garden, you will have to care for it for life," she says, expressing her outlook regarding these residential projects. "I never think of a garden that my client will not tend to." It's an exacting vision that comes to the fore on projects such as the Ramp House. For this home, designed by Brazilian architect Marcio Kogan, Duprat created a landscape that includes fruiting, flowering and bird-attracting trees such as jaboticabas and jacarandas, as well as a pool lined with vegetation. The effect, for those who take a dip, is like swimming in the middle of a tropical rainforest. "I drew the pool as a body of water that was surrounded by vegetation," says Duprat. "It's almost like a flowerbed that has the ability to reflect and illuminate."

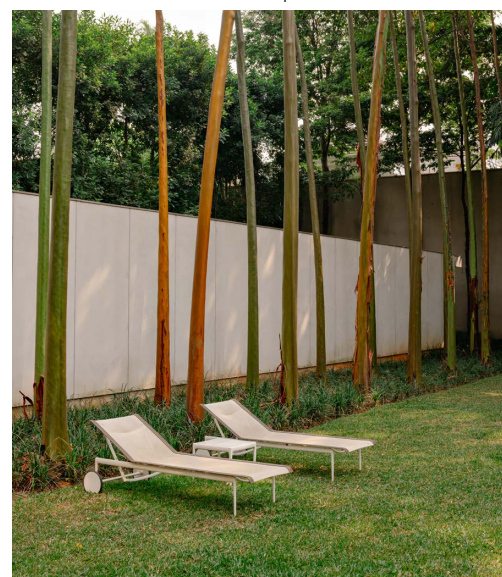
For another property, Jardim Brasileiro (a name that simply means, "Brazilian garden"), Duprat subverted the typical residential formula by prioritising a larger front garden over creating a more private space at the back of the house. The result is a grand, verdant gesture of welcome for those arriving to the property, a dramatic experience for those entering the home. "I wanted to bring my own interpretation of Brazil's native forests to this garden," says Duprat. "You can't imitate forests, of course, but I wanted to create a sensation that we experiment when we go deep into one."

This sense of discovery is important for Duprat's work. In another of her projects, Casa 3M, the garden has been laid out to limit sightlines and so create a sense of intrigue. "The pool in this house can't be seen from the living room and terrace," says Duprat. "A garden shouldn't be unveiled in only one look. Instead, you should be encouraged

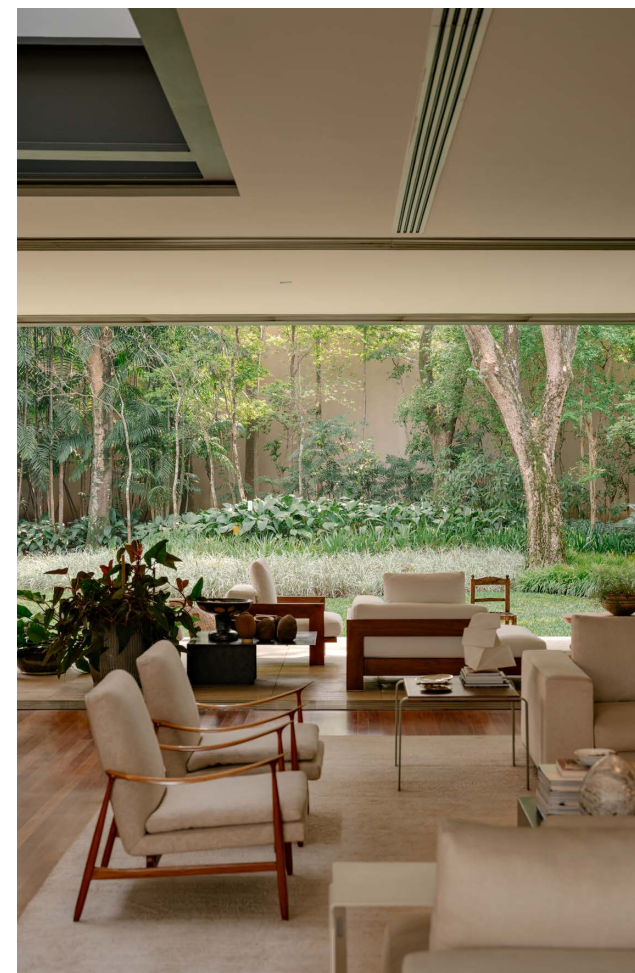
1. Studying among the greenery
2. A place to relax
3. Neutral tones contrast with the lush landscape
4. Flora is the focus of Casa 3M
5. An inviting entrance



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to discover it through its fluidity and its empty and full spaces. That feeling of discovery is exciting and attracts us to the place. I drew inspiration from the Japanese for this, who do it like no one else.”

In all three cases, her work enhances the architecture. And in many ways, she has allowed the gardens to become perhaps the defining feature of each plot. The buildings, without the lush landscaping framing structures of concrete, glass and brick, would lack their particular visual impact. “I don’t see the work I do as an add-on to architecture,” says Duprat. “But I feel that for most in Brazil today, it is an after-thought. And it’s a shame, because the eye of the landscape architect is different from that of the architect. We work on different scales, with the sky as a reference, and that changes our perceptions completely. We work with the surroundings, with the wider landscape.”

It’s an outlook on her discipline that feels appropriate for a country so aligned with the outdoors. Its biggest

cities have warm and balmy year-round temperatures and are home to plants such as bougainvilleas and bromelias, spaces that are bright and uplifting – all traits that make Brazil an appealing place for living with beautiful gardens and being more in touch with nature.

And that particular Brazilian stamp can be seen in the gardens, dense with native species, that Duprat designs. It is also part of her wider vision to fight the urban heat-island effect and add greenery to São Paulo. In fact, Duprat’s passion for vegetation is so intense that during the planning process for a home, she once requested that the structure be moved by 50cm to make space for a large native tree. “In São Paulo, the trees gives the city a dignified look,” she says. The same too could be said of her landscape architecture, whether civic or residential, whether in her hometown, in Rio de Janeiro or elsewhere across Brazil. “For me, it’s difficult to define the work I do. But there is an implicit Brazilian touch to it.” —  [isabelduprat.com](http://isabelduprat.com)

**Offshoots**

From her studio in São Paulo’s Jardins neighbourhood (meaning, appropriately, “gardens”), Duprat has been delivering some of the city’s finest residential and civic projects. Here are four of our favourite properties.

**Albert Einstein Education and Research Centre**

*Architect:* Safdie Architects  
*Completed:* 2022

An innovative research building. An atrium through the centre of the structure features an indoor garden that spills from the roof to the basement, bringing the outdoors in.

**Casa 3M**

*Architect:* Marcio Kogan  
*Completed:* 2020

An open-plan home made with natural materials: timber ceilings and volcanic rock floors.

Its connection with the natural world continues outdoors, where a garden features greenery planted in patterns.

**Ramp House**

*Architect:* Marcio Kogan, Studio MK27  
*Completed:* 2015

This residence in the centre of São Paulo feels as though it could be in a Brazilian rainforest. Native plants

surround an outdoor pool that’s perfect for the warmer months.

**Jardim Brasileiro**

*Architect:* Andrade Morettin  
*Completed:* 2009

A house surrounded by tiered garden beds that follow the site’s contours, blurring the lines between indoors and out. The residence presents itself as a continuous exploration of textures and colours.